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ABSTRACT

The report describes the development of an alternative performance assessment procedure for certifying adults at the secondary school level in the New York External High School Diploma Program. Unlike standardized group tests, the alternative method is characterized by such features as flexibility in time and location of testing, variety of communication methods, and continuous feedback to students. The program's first developmental objective for 1974-75 was a field test demonstration. Preparatory steps for the field test included defining performance criteria (translating generalized competencies into behavioral terms, with accompanying performance indicators), designing assessment components (developing diagnostic procedures and procedures for assessing generalized and individualized competencies), and designing the operational form of the assessment system. Later steps included pre-testing the assessment system (selection and recruitment of subjects and observers, and method of testing), and defining the role of the learning consultants (program development, counseling adult learners, and administering tests). The second objective, the awarding of diplomas, included gathering information on the program's first 20 graduates for later use in program revision. Objective three, the production of a final external diploma assessment package, will require additional time to accomplish. (JR)

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DEVELOPMENT OF A PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM FOR THE CENTRAL NEW YORK EXTERNAL HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROGRAM AN EDUCATIONAL ALTERNATIVE FOR ADULTS

A PROGRESS REPORT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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SUMMARY

On March 11, 1975, Commissioner Ewald B. Nyquist presented high school diplomas to the first eighteen graduates of the Central New York External High School Diploma Program. The ceremony, held at the State University at Cortland, was attended by some two hundred persons who have been involved in the program since its inception, families and friends of the graduates. Commissioner Nyquist, in describing the program, called it "humane and relevant" and hoped for its adoption throughout the state.

The graduation exercise was a milestone in the developmental effort which was begun by Stephen K. Bailey in 1972. The event was a happy and significant pause in the on-going demonstration of the educational innovation for adults, and the ceremony itself was a concrete summary of the progress to date on the project.

The following report describes the project's progress from August 1974 through April 1975. It contains a description of the unique characteristics of the program and the specific details of the design and implementation of the demonstration and assessment system. The report presents the steps from conceptual design to an operational procedure which, although currently in practice, represents only a phase in the logical completion of the demonstration. If we are to answer essential questions about feasibility and replication, and bring the demonstration to completion, it is required that we continue to operate the program until 1977.

DEVELOPMENT OF A PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM FOR THE CENTRAL NEW YORK EXTERNAL HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROGRAM

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to trace the progress made by the assessment staff of the Regional Learning Service of Central New York (RLS) in the development of a performance assessment procedure for certification of adults at the secondary school level through an external high school diploma program. The aim has been to create a new diploma program specifically tailored to the needs and experiences of adults in twentieth century America.

The demonstration, funded by the Ford Foundation and by the New York State Education Department, is being conducted by RLS, a division of the Syracuse University Research Corporation. Dr. Ruth S. Nickse, Project Director, is assisted by Ms. Linda Lehman and three part-time persons assigned to the assessment staff.

II. HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRAM

The Central New York External High School Diploma Program, guided in its design by a set of assumptions about adult students, is essentially an assessment program quite different from familiar standardized machine-scored testing programs.

The development of this new performance assessment system was predicated on the RLS understanding of the need felt by many adult learners for a testing

situation responsive to their particular abilities and concerns. It was anticipated that many potential diploma candidates would have had disappointments and failures in standardized group testing situations and could, therefore, be expected to be highly text anxious; perhaps cynical and rebellious about testing which was irrelevant to their concerns as adults; very busy managing full-time jobs and families; highly motivated to work for a diploma after years out of school; responsible; and in need of an opportunity to choose assessment modes which would best enable them to present their skills and competencies. These assumptions about potential candidates led to the development of an assessment program which is unique. Some key features are summarized below.

Flexibility in Time and Location. The system's self-paced characteristics provide the opportunity for busy adults with heavy responsibilities to establish some of the conditions of testing. Three out of five assessment tasks can be completed at home, or, if preferred by the student, performed in the RLS office without time limits. This flexibility in timing, as well as some choice of environment (home or at the RLS office) offers testing conditions designed to reduce test anxiety and improve performance.

Open Information on Requirements. The competencies which must be demonstrated for successful completion of the program are made explicit and are discussed freely during the counseling and the final assessment procedure. This openness of the test content represents a departure from familiar test procedures and is consonant with the structure and philosophy of the program.

Breadth of Skills and Knowledge. In addition to comprehension and recall skills, the program rewards occupational skills and process skills with emphasis on the latter. Many of the items in the tasks call for application of cognitive skills of synthesis and analysis, rather than requiring the more familiar, and lower order thinking skills of comprehension and recall.

Variety of Communication Modes. The take-home projects require presentations of student's work in written form, and provide opportunity for those with strong writing skills to present them in this fashion. In addition, two oral performance interviews encourage persons who may feel more comfortable in expressing themselves and what they know through speech.

Flexibility of Assessment. Process skills, such as accurate math functions, which have only one "right" answer, of course, must be answered with 100 percent accuracy. Many other items, however, have a broad range of acceptable answers, e.g., items which ask for a person to present information about the location, use and comparison of community resources. Items that require documentation or other proofs can be supported in a variety of acceptable forms.

Continuous Feedback to Students. Progress through the assessment program is transmitted at each step to students through written reports mailed to their homes. Assignment tasks are not "failed" or "passed." There is no "passing score." Competencies are simply demonstrated or

not demonstrated and each competency is so noted in the task performance report to the student. If a competency has not been demonstrated (it is either incomplete or incorrect) an explanation of the error is included.

Unlimited Opportunities to Demonstrate Competencies. Students may attempt as often as they wish to demonstrate those competencies they were unable to exercise adequately on the five basic assessment tasks. Since clearly defined competencies are being assessed, there is no need for a learner to repeat an entire task when a particular competency has not been demonstrated.

III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES - SEPTEMBER 1974 TO APRIL 1975

The objectives of the program during Phase III, covered by the contract September 1, 1974 - December 1975, was three fold: (1) to field test (demonstrate) all components of the model for an external high school diploma, (2) to award diplomas to those who demonstrate the competencies which constitute the content of the external diploma, and (3) to produce the final text of an assessment package that would be suitable for use by local school districts and the State. Substantial progress has been made on objectives one and two. The field test with actual diploma candidates began formally on December 1, 1974. By April 1975, 20 adults have received high school diplomas. Objective three activities are underway and will be discussed later. The progress to date on the above objectives follows.

A. Objective One - The Field Test Demonstration

All components of the program had to be pre-tested on paid subjects in order to prepare a legitimate demonstration of an external high school diploma program. This initial pre-testing, which would closely approximate the procedures to be used during the subsequent demonstration, was designed and implemented during the period from August 1974 through November 30, 1974. The only valid demonstration, however, is with actual diploma candidates. Field testing with candidates began December 1, 1974.

Before field testing could be conducted, a number of major preparatory steps were completed: definition of performance criteria, development of the assessment components (diagnostic and final testing instruments for assessing Generalized and Individualized Competencies) and operational design of the assessment system by which the demonstration would be conducted.

1. Definition of Performance Criteria

When an assessment procedure is developed, a value is placed on certain knowledges and skills. Therefore, the precursor of any assessment system is the identification of the content area to be tested. For this project, identification of content meant the translation of the Generalized Competencies selected by the Design Group into behavioral terms, with accompanying performance indicators, which could be the basis for the development of new assessment procedures.

Accordingly, in October 1973, a task force of persons was assembled to define the minimum competencies. The fourteen persons were

selected according to the following criteria:*

1. Knowledge of the secondary school curricula.
2. Prior teaching or work experience with adult learners.
3. Broad life experience.
4. Ability and prior experience in writing behavioral objectives.

Two assumptions, based on familiarity with the needs of adult learners, provided a working framework for the task force:

1. That although the acquisition of learning may be discrete, its application is wholistic. Therefore, competencies in the tool subjects (communication and computation) as well as in Life Skills must be survival-oriented and demonstrable in context.
2. That coping adults in a changing society must be able to use process skills such as data gathering, manipulation, and application in problem solving with information that is personally and socially relevant. Therefore, competencies and the performances by which they are tested must be related to the common developmental tasks of adulthood.

The fourteen developers, working in small groups, across and within disciplines, identified and selected by consensus sixty-four competencies which they felt responded to this question, "What skills do adults need to cope with daily living?" When a preliminary list of competencies had been identified, persons from small business, industry, unions, schools and social agencies were asked to react to each competency. Their written comments and their ratings of the importance and relevance of the competencies were provided as feedback on which the development group based further selection of the competencies and refinement of the performance indicators.

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*See Appendix A, Competency Development Task Force.

On March 14, 1975, the third draft of the competencies list was approved by the Regional Committee for the External Diploma Program,* and submitted by its chairman to the State Education Department for its approval of a pre-test to be conducted through December 1974. The Department, on August 21, 1974, instructed the Regional Learning Service to proceed with field testing of the competencies assessment system.

2. Design of Assessment Components

A new assessment program offering adults an alternative system of demonstrating real-life competencies in practical settings was the goal of the assessment design effort. A battery of standardized instruments, normed on youngsters in high school classes, obviously would not produce the sought for alternatives nor the opportunity to apply the competencies to the practical problems faced by adults.

Therefore, the assessment team developed a new assessment system with the following objectives:

1. To give some control over the testing environment to the candidates. This was accomplished by designing the process of diagnosis and assessment to be initiated on demand by the candidates and self-paced.
2. To make the assessment process a learning experience. Thus, candidates are fully informed of requirements and their performances at each step. The testing process emphasizes synthesizing and application, rather than simply knowledge and comprehension.

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*See Appendix B.

3. To relate assessment in form and content to the concerns of adults. The content, therefore, consists of projects based on the practical developmental tasks of adulthood (changing residence, applying for a job, consumer awareness, caring for family and personal health).* These projects are performed as take-home simulations and as oral interviews. This process permits flexible scheduling for completing the work.
4. To make the testing process humane. Thus, the procedure is individualized, allowing candidates to assume much responsibility while providing them with continuous feedback and success experiences.

a. Diagnostic Procedures

The RLS assessment staff decided to include, at the outset of the assessment process, a diagnostic step. This provides candidates with (1) concrete information about the competency required, (2) supportive feedback on the many competencies they already possess, (3) specific information on the competencies they still need to develop, and (4) experience in modes of assessment they did not encounter in school. Basically, RLS wanted to give candidates a feeling of confidence while helping them to overcome any feelings of inadequacy and failure.

Not all competencies could be tested by available commercial instruments so the staff designed several new diagnostic instruments.

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*Haveghurst, Robert, Developmental Tasks and Education (Third Edition), David McKay, New York, 1972.

Instruments Designed by RLS

. Self-Assessment Checklist - RLS. A self-administered checklist which familiarized candidates with the Generalized Competencies which they will be asked to demonstrate in the final assessment. It asks them to rate their own abilities, primarily in the Life Skills area.

. Math Diagnostic - RLS. A math diagnostic based on the required math competencies which must be demonstrated in the final assessment procedure.

. Writing Diagnostic - RLS. A writing diagnostic, based on writing competencies which must be demonstrated in the final assessment procedure.

Some commercial instruments were sufficient for diagnostic purposes in the program.

Commercial Instruments

. Reading/Everyday Activities in Life (R/EAL) - Lichtman. A standardized reading test developed by the Job Corps for use with adults. It is self-administered and based on comprehension of materials common to adult reading tasks (maps, sets of directions, job applications, matrix reading, leases).

. Self-Directed Search - Holland. A self-administered inventory for use in determining occupational interests and abilities.

b. Assessment of Generalized Competencies

The assessment team developed five assessment instruments or tasks for the assessment of Generalized Competencies. Each task provides a framework within which the candidates demonstrate a variety of generalized competencies in fulfillment of requirements for the diploma program.

A brief description of the five tasks follows:

TASK 1: CHANGE OF RESIDENCE - This task of selecting a new apartment through the want-ad section of the newspaper provides an opportunity for the demonstration of many widely-used competencies. Computation, measurement, reading, writing, map skills are tested.

TASK II: PERSONAL AND FAMILY HEALTH - An oral interview by a public health nurse, using a structured checklist, elicits competencies in personal and family health and safety.

TASK III: OCCUPATIONAL PREPAREDNESS - Job seeking skills are demonstrated through such activities as comparing and classifying jobs advertised in newspapers, writing a resume and letters of application for jobs, and identifying payroll deductions.

TASK IV: PERFORMANCE INTERVIEW - A trained assessor poses problems in measurement, conversion, map skills and in listening and viewing. A writing exercise on the topic "Why I Need a High School Diploma" becomes the basis for a semi-structured conversation concerning the students' values, needs and goals.

TASK V: CONSUMER AWARENESS - This task is focused on applying problem solving skills to consumer purchases. The candidate is required

to demonstrate reasoning, reading and writing skills as they are related to good consumer practices.

This combination of three take-home projects and two oral assignments provides the opportunity for demonstration of the sixty-four competencies deemed as minimum requirements in computation, communication, and other Life Skills. Successful performance of these competencies is required of all students. The tasks are not sequential and can be performed in any order.

c. Assessment of Individualized Competencies

In addition to demonstrating a common set of minimum Generalized Competencies, each candidate must also prove possession of advanced competencies in an area of his or her choice.

There are at present three areas in which students may request to complete assessments in Individualized Competencies. This allows wide choice for students, as they must meet requirements in only one of the three possible areas and within each area there are choices to be made. The areas are:

. Occupational/Vocational.

. Advanced Academic (for college preparation).

. Advanced Specialized Competencies.

Each area identified within the Individualized Competencies presents a need for a different assessment technique.

(1) Occupational/Vocational (entry level job skills). There are two alternatives available to candidates should they choose assessment in this area.

. Employers Testimony. This assessment procedure is designed for candidates who have worked for a year or more at the same job. Documentation in the form of a questionnaire filled out by an immediate supervisor attests to the on-the-job duties and responsibilities of the candidates. A worker characteristics checklist, also filled out by the supervisor, rates the candidate on non-skills characteristics which are important to that particular job. Satisfactory documentation, through employers testimony, constitutes meeting occupational/vocational requirements for the diploma program.

. Performance. This assessment procedure may be requested by candidates who have occupational/vocational skills, but have not been employed for a years' time, who are self-employed, or who are employed in a family business. Judgment of specialists in the particular occupational/vocational area is sought in evaluating entry-level job skills of the candidates. The RLS assessment staff locates a Master Craftsperson, one who is employed as a professional in that field, and arranges for a performance assessment to be conducted insofar as possible in an on-the-job setting. Agreement on criteria for judging entry-level job skills in each field must be determined by consensus of experts, and great variations exist even among experts in the same field as to what consitutes entry-level criteria for jobs. Therefore, the RLS assessment staff carefully selects an appropriate craftsperson to perform the assessment and accepts, as well as collects, the criteria by which the candidate is evaluated. In this manner, criteria for different jobs, expressed by specialists, are collected and analyzed by the RLS assessment staff for future occupational/vocational assessments.

. New York State Licensing. The assessment staff is investigating the potential of accepting current New York State licenses in occupational fields as evidence of occupational competence. An acceptable current license would constitute satisfactory documentation, and would fulfill the occupational/vocational requirement.

(2) Advanced Academic. This assessment procedure was developed from the suggestions of admissions administrators at several local two- and four-year colleges. Called the Advanced Academic Task, it requires candidates to demonstrate a readiness for college level work by requiring them to present several kinds of evidence. The evidence requested involves autobiographical essays which outline candidates' past and present educational aims, as well as a feasibility analysis of the particular problems candidates might encounter in college attendance. Some evidence of ability to do college work is required. This evidence may be of two kinds, presentation of some original work which indicates college level abilities, or an acceptable score on standardized tests in math and reading competencies. The Iowa Test of Educational Development in math and reading has been selected by the assessment team as an appropriate instrument for indicating readiness for college level work. This test, although somewhat at odds with the assessment philosophy of the program, has been used in the absence of other suitable assessment procedures which would attest to the ability of adults to do college level work. Other acceptable criteria for making this judgment are under exploration by the assessment staff.

(3) Advanced Specialized. This assessment procedure, designed primarily to enable persons to demonstrate a strong avocational skill, presents a similar assessment problem as that of the occupational/vocational area, and is handled by the use of judgment of specialists.

3. Design of the Operation of the Assessment System

The organization of the assessment procedures from program entry to program exit can be summarized in eight steps. The diagram which follows presents the eight steps as they would be taken by any student.

Step 1: Students are assigned RLS learning consultants who describe the alternative diploma programs available (e.g., high school equivalency, twenty-four community college credits, evening high school).

Step 2: For students who select the external diploma program, diagnostic pre-testing is administered by the RLS learning consultant (see description of diagnostic instruments, Section 1).

Step 2A: If diagnostic pre-testing exposes deficiencies in competencies, learning prescriptions are issued, and students enter necessary learning phases. These may be brief or extended, depending on the deficiency. Students are informed by RLS of the places and persons in the community where competencies can be learned.

Step 3: If diagnostic pre-testing reveals that competencies are at the required level, the student immediately begins the assessment of Generalized Competencies (Tasks I - V described above). Since candidates could receive help from others on the tasks they complete at home, they are required to demonstrate certain key competencies to the assessment staff. The competencies to be spot-checked are known in advance by the candidates.

Step 4: The individualized assessment area is picked by students, and the processes are initiated to fulfill these requirements. Step 4 occurs concurrently with Step 3.

Step 5: The post-task assessment is the occasion for the demonstration of Generalized Competencies not successfully demonstrated in Tasks I - V. Post-task assessments may be repeated until competencies are demonstrated.

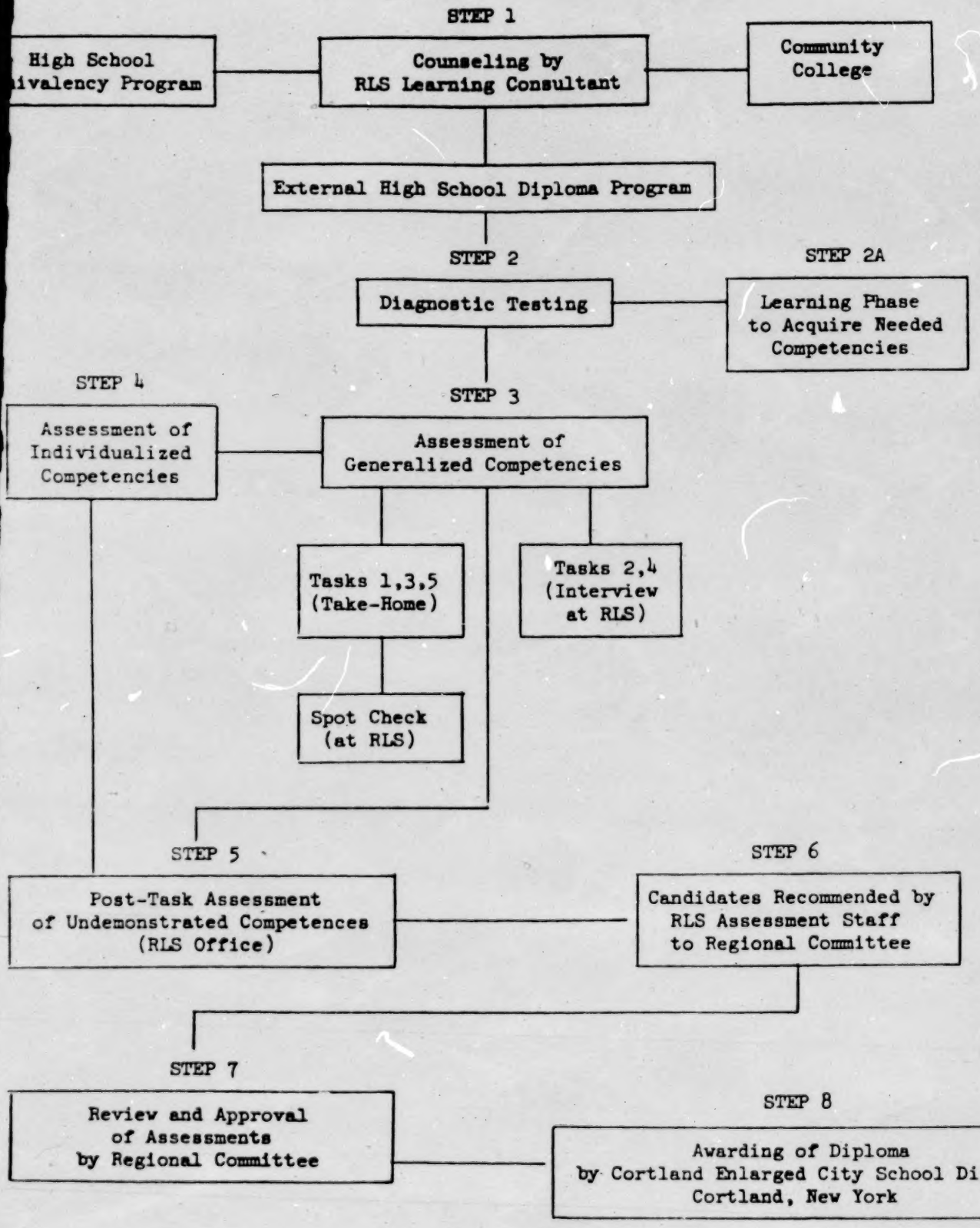
Step 6: The RLS assessment team constantly monitors students' progress and issues progress reports to students, as well as maintaining records and assembling students' portfolios. Upon their recommendation, completed portfolios are submitted for review by the Regional Committee.

Step 7: The Regional Committee, composed of 16 local persons from education, business and industry, meet monthly to review the portfolios which contain the records of student performance in assessments, to approve them, and to recommend awarding of diplomas for successful completion of requirements.

Step 8: On the recommendation of the Regional Committee, the Cortland, New York, City School Board awards Cortland diplomas to successful students on a bi-monthly basis. Special circumstances may result in a more frequent action on the part of the Cortland School Board.

A Procedures Manual for the assessment system was developed as a guideline for use by the learning consultants and staff. It sets forth all steps in the assessment system: diagnostic testing, task taking, feedback and records maintenance. It also describes the roles of the student, the learning consultant, the RLS assessment staff (two full-time, one part-time) and the part-time assessors (two).

ORGANIZATION OF ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES FOR
THE EXTERNAL HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROGRAM


STEP 1
High School ivalency Program
Counseling by RLS Learning Consultant
Community College
External High School Diploma Program
STEP 2
STEP 2A
Diagnostic Testing
Learning Phase to Acquire Needed Competencies
STEP 4
STEP 3
Assessment of Individualized Competencies
Assessment of Generalized Competencies
Tasks 1,3,5 (Take-Home)
Tasks 2,4 (Interview at RLS)
Spot Check (at RLS)
STEP 5
STEP 6
Post-Task Assessment of Undemonstrated Competences (RLS Office)
Candidates Recommended by RLS Assessment Staff to Regional Committee
STEP 7
STEP 8
Review and Approval of Assessments by Regional Committee
Awarding of Diploma by Cortland Enlarged City School District Cortland, New York

4. Pre-Test of Assessment System

Both the test instruments (tasks) and the process itself (of take-home projects, oral assessments) were pre-tested by paid subjects in the fall of 1974, during the months of September, October and November. A short description of the pre-test follows.

a. Selection and Recruitment of Subjects

The paid subjects were selected to be as similar to the anticipated target population as possible in age and ethnic background. All had high school diplomas, but no further education. The selection of subjects with high school diplomas was desirable. If credentialed adults had these skills, then others seeking the same credentials could legitimately be expected to demonstrate them.

b. Selection of Observers

Because information on both content and process of the assessment program was needed, trained observers with experience in observation techniques were recruited from graduate students of Syracuse University. They were told by the assessment staff to act as "private secretaries" to the subjects, recording all activities and feelings expressed by subjects as they worked through each task.

c. Method of Pre-Testing

As each task was developed, subject/observer pairs were scheduled to meet with a member of the assessment staff for a briefing session which included getting acquainted and establishing rapport. The pairs then

worked together until the task was completed, under conditions which would approximate those expected of adults in a self-directed, take-home project. Observers recorded all actions and comments of the subjects, and accompanied them wherever necessary for successful completion of the task. When the subject finished a task, a debriefing occurred and the subject contributed insights as to clarity of directions, format of task, misconceptions and misunderstandings. Each task was revised repeatedly on the basis of input from subject-observer pairs until directions and procedures were clearly stated. Each of the five tasks designed to elicit the Generalized Competencies was tested in this fashion by the adult subjects. Fortunately, eight of the subjects were able to complete each of the tasks providing continuity and consistency of reactions. Also, the same observers were used throughout the pre-tests. These in-depth field experiences, although small in numbers of subjects, generated 314 hours of subject-observer interactions and provided sufficient feedback to accomplish revisions of task instruments.

The same type of subject/observer interaction was used to pre-test processes in the Individualized Competencies areas, but because of time pressures, only one of each type of Individualized Assessment procedure was attempted. These resulted in process revisions also, but more experience with this portion of the diploma is needed.

An Occupational/Vocational Assessment in the area of entry-level meat cutting skills was carried out by an observer and paid apprentice meat cutter. This included location of an appropriate master butcher, an interview to determine assessment conditions, and then an actual meatcutting

performance test, carried out on-site by the master butcher, the subject apprentice, and the observer. From this experience, criteria for entry-level job skills in meat cutting were evolved. It is anticipated that the criteria generated by several master craftspersons will provide an array of entry-level job skills which, at some later date, can be established as diploma program minimums. This is the model which will be used whenever it is necessary to assess occupational/vocational competencies in lieu of a years' satisfactory experience on the job. The process itself seems to be adequate but will be adjusted in light of experience.

The Advanced Academic area, which was defined by admissions directors of several local colleges and junior colleges, was also pre-tested with one paid subject. The individual, following the outlines of the college readiness task, assembled a college readiness portfolio and also took standardized tests in math and reading competencies. She presented this portfolio to local admissions officers at one public two-year institution and at a four-year private institution for discussion. Both administrative officials provided feedback to the RLS assessment staff as to the adequacy of the materials which will guide the continuing refinement of this process.

A Specialized Competencies Assessment in the area of art was also carried out. A student submitted a portfolio of original art productions for judgment and for recognition in the Specialized Competencies area. The RLS assessment staff located a commercial artist, arranged for an on-site visit to the studio, where the products were evaluated and some useful criteria were delineated for commercial art job skills at entry-level.

As a result of the pre-test of the five tasks designed to elicit Generalized Competencies and the pre-test of the three areas of the Individualized Competencies, the following were revised and judged adequate for use with candidates. All instruments and processes, however, are considered in the first generation stage and require data from actual use to refine them properly.

1. Diagnostic pre-test instruments.
2. Final assessment tasks (Generalized Competencies).
3. Final assessment tasks (Individualized Competencies).
4. Spot checks.
5. Post-task assessment procedures.

5. Role of the RLS Learning Consultant

The role of the RLS Learning Consultants in Phase III of the external diploma project has three dimensions: (a) program development, (b) counseling of adult learners, and (c) administration of diagnostic testing.

a. Program Development

Learning consultants have assisted in the development of the program, principally in providing feedback in the design of operations and procedures of the assessment system. A ten-step procedures manual, which is used by the learning consultants to counsel individuals in the program is a result of training sessions held by the assessment staff and the learning consultants.

b. Counseling Adult Learners

Learning consultants have counseled adult learners who have expressed a need to obtain a high school diploma. Learning consultants impart detailed information on the four alternative paths to the high school credential in New York State (the GED, adult high school programs, the 24-hour community college route and the Central New York External Diploma program). Individuals choosing to work for a high school credential through the external diploma program have been assigned learning consultants who have explained the program details to them, and provided support and encouragement.

c. Administration of Diagnostic Testing

Learning consultants have attended several training sessions which have equipped them to administer diagnostic testing for the external diploma program. This step in assessment provides the learning consultants and the adult learners with specific knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses before they begin the final assessment process. The final assessment process is administered by the assessment staff. During the final assessment phase, the learning consultant's role is largely supportive.

The three dimensions described above have constituted the role of the learning consultants in the external diploma program through the development phase of the project. The experience to date is not representative of the role of the learning consultant in any replication of program. No replication would need to utilize persons such as learning consultants for development of procedures, as they are now complete.

The principal function of the learning consultants now in the demonstration are counseling and diagnostic testing. It is not clear at this early stage of the demonstration how much counseling will be necessary in any replication. This is one of the questions to be studied as the field test demonstration continues. Data is currently being gathered towards this end.

B. Objective Two - Awarding of the Diplomas

By December 1, 1974, the system was complete enough to begin assessing students, and on January 28, 1975, the Cortland School Board unanimously voted to award its high school diploma to the first ten graduates who had successfully completed the program by that date.

On March 11, 1975, Commissioner Nyquist officially presented the Cortland City School District diplomas to the first eighteen graduates of the program. The ceremony, held at SUNY Cortland, was attended by several hundred persons who had been involved at one time or another in the development of the program, and by relatives and friends of the graduates.

The awarding of a Cortland City School diploma occurred as a result of several presentations given by the RLS assessment staff to the Cortland Board of Education and communications from the State Education Department. On October 3, 1974, a Department official requested the Cortland City School Board to award its diploma to individuals throughout the five counties in Central New York who complete the external diploma program. On October 22nd, Cortland Board members unanimously voted to do so when candidates are recommended by the Regional Committee.

The Regional Committee for the External Diploma Program has contributed and continues to contribute to its successful demonstration. The members of the Regional Committee act as the school board for the diploma process. Members include educators, administrators, business and union representatives from throughout the Central New York area. They meet monthly for three to four hours with the assessment staff to review and monitor its work.

The Committee members, who volunteer their services, read and review the portfolios which contain all of the work completed by each of the candidates for the diploma. They formally vote to recommend that the Cortland City School Board award its diplomas to the candidates under review. Committee members make policy decisions concerning many aspects of the program as well. They have, as occasion demanded, served on sub-committees to assist in redesign of the procedures manual, to plan the graduation ceremonies, and to fill, with appropriate members, vacancies on the Committee.

They also act as liaison between RLS and the State Education Department, and report to the Joint Management Team of regional educators. Because of their business, professional and personal affiliations, the members are spokespersons for the program on many community levels. Their commitment, high level of enthusiasm, and participation is an essential component of the assessment system and has contributed significantly to the successful completion of the program by the candidates.

Demographic information is gathered on the persons engaged as candidates in the program and is incorporated into case studies of the individuals

in the program. This information is gathered to provide feedback on the system to the assessment team.

Information on First Eighteen Graduates

Age Range	19 - 61 years (average 34.5 years)
Sex	9 men, 9 women
Race	9 black, 9 white

In mid-April, there are 41 persons in the program, in various phases of counseling, diagnostic testing, learning, or final assessment. On the average, individuals are taking less than three months to complete the assessment system which is self-paced and self-initiated.

In order to gather complete data on the content and the process of the assessment system, an extensive post-graduation interview schedule has been designed, and is being administered to all graduates of the program by members of the assessment staff. This information, which is enthusiastically reported by the recent graduates, will become the basis for program revision and refinement. A recent graduate of the program will be asked to become a member of the Regional Committee. In addition, a one-year follow-up interview is planned to determine how having earned the high school credential has affected the educational or job goals of the graduates.

C. Objective Three - Production of a Final External Diploma Assessment Package

The successful completion of the program by 20 graduates by mid-April is a major achievement. It does not provide, however, an adequate experience and data base on which to produce the definitive texts of a completed assessment package, including cost analyses, personnel and training recommendations, and manuals for assessors and clients.

RLS had planned to test the assessment procedures in a school setting but first needs more experience with its own administration of the program. The present contract with the Department will enable the demonstration to continue only through June 1975. RLS will, therefore, request an extension of the contract to continue the demonstration in several settings for two years to collect the data necessary for replication of the external diploma program throughout the State of New York.

IV. CONCLUSION

This report has described the substantial progress made on objectives one and two in Phase III. RLS has set in motion the field test, but the demonstration is by no means complete. Completion of the program, including all components necessary for replication, will be accomplished when the following objectives have been attained.

1. Decentralization of RLS effort to Cortland, possibly Oswego, and Auburn.
2. Demonstration of program in other environments.
3. Revision of assessment package based on experience.

Questions which remain to be answered prior to recommendation for replication include:

1. What are the costs of replication?
2. What are the possible sites for replication?
3. What are the personnel and training techniques necessary to implement the program?

This educational alternative has had, in its short life, a demonstrable impact on the lives of some 20 adults who have completed it and another 40 still in the program. It is imperative for the success of the program, and for its potential impact on thousands of adults, for it to be continued until the unanswered and presently unanserable questions have been explored. If RLS were to develop texts of manuals for assessors and clients on the basis of experience through June 1975, they would be appropriate for Syracuse, but of limited value elsewhere. Therefore, RLS wishes to continue the demonstration in a variety of settings, with diverse population groups, to refine the assessment components of the program, and to ensure its transferability.

APPENDIX A

CENTRAL NEW YORK STATE EXTERNAL HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROGRAM

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APPENDIX B

REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE CENTRAL NEW YORK EXTERNAL HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA PROGRAM

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